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## **Facilitating Circle Success Through Networking**

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Numerous steps have been taken by Human Resource personnel and Quality Circle members at Los Alamos National Laboratory to increase networking opportunities between themselves and other organizations. Many Circle successes can be attributed to factors such as Lab-wide Circle activities and meetings, Employee Involvement Team reports, a videotape library for reference, and communications from Sandia National Laboratory and Livermore National Laboratory, and other organizations. A detailed description of how to make networking more effective will be given. Conference participants will have the opportunity to take part in a networking activity.

### **Introduction**

For an organization to be successful in its networking efforts, it would benefit from first involving a high degree of participative management which utilizes shared power and responsibility (Krause 1984). That is to say, the Laboratory would not be able to promote this type of networking without first promoting some degree of participative management. In addition, the organization should recognize the advantage of multi-group membership and thereby facilitate the development of interdependent groups. This implies that in a closed system, effective involvement of the employees may serve to facilitate the exchange of information vital to the optimal functioning of the organization. Therefore, employee involvement can be profitably encouraged. Such support would promote and fuel greater productive capacity and innovation within the organization.

There is a direct relationship between the exchange of information and an awareness of interdependence (Mulford 1984). Networking may eliminate significant differences in organizational and/or divisional properties. Through networking, employees realize their similarities and their ability to productively function with individuals in other, perhaps competitive, organizations and divisions. Management can also contribute to Circle success by involving themselves, formally or informally, with Circle members by offering their knowledge and skill in the area of Circle interest (Kanter 1983).

### **The Laboratory Environment**

The Laboratory, founded in 1941, now has approximately 40 divisions and over 200 groups. Unlike many other organizations, the Laboratory maintains

a functioning position somewhere between that of a university and an industry. Los Alamos has a large, multidisciplinary capacity and is responsible for such diverse activities as research and development in almost every scientific area from the life sciences to information systems.

Such diversity calls for an organization which will promote collaboration between the many divisions in order that the Laboratory may carry out its mission. The almost innumerable levels and cross sections of management require an extremely effective method of communication and collaboration in order to reach the common goal. The physical size of the Laboratory as well creates a problem which many other organizations do not face. Even divisions with relatively similar responsibilities are often separated by great distances making the exchange of information more difficult and time consuming.

### **The Quality Circles**

The Laboratory became involved in Quality Circles about 1981. There are now approximately 11 functioning Quality Circles at Los Alamos National Laboratory. The Quality Circles represent many different groups and divisions. The divisions involved include: Computing & Communications; Health, Safety & Environment; Information Services; Dynamic Testing; Materials Management; Materials, Science & Technology; Design Engineering; Protocol; and Accelerator Technology.

In July, 1986, Employee Involvement Team interviews, conducted by the author, revealed positive growth for each functioning Quality Circle. Taking part in the interviewing process were Circle representatives from the following groups: HSE-9 (Quality Control), HSE-10 (Safety), IS-9 (Photography), IS-10 (Composing), IS-12 (Illustration/Design), MST-9 (Drafting), MST-10 (Non-Destructive Assay), MST-13 (Foundry Operations), AT-8 (Neutral Particle Beam Control Instrumentation), PR-2 (Food Services), and PR-3 (Protocol). The Quality Circle coordinator and a certified facilitator with the Laboratory were also interviewed.

### **Networking Methods**

The Training Office at Los Alamos National Laboratory has extended its services to include a central information center for functioning Quality Circles at the Laboratory. The Training Office makes available a wide variety of resources beneficial to Circle members for developing their Circle process. The Training Specialists, Lois J. Thompson and Rod Brown, work extensively with team building, strategic planning, and Quality Circles. These services, made continually available, further promote employee involvement and information sharing. A formal Lab-wide course has been organized to teach facilitator and leader skills. This course has also been presented to specific groups at their request.

An activity conducted for several years by Lois Thompson, the Laboratory Quality Circle Coordinator, is the Noontime Meeting of Quality Circle members and management. This year the meeting took place on April 15, 1986 and served as a forum for the exchange of ideas and methods. Representatives from each Circle were present and were responsible for a report of their Circle's projects and progress. The meeting began with an explanation of the Quality Circle concept, followed by the Circle reports. The meeting ended with a panel discussion pertaining to Circle effectiveness and the efforts of the Laboratory. Participating were four panelists and a moderator who answered questions about Quality Circles, conveyed Circle experiences, and endorsed the Circle process. Comments indicated the meeting was so successful in enlightening employees about the concept of participative management and in producing an enthusiasm in those persons not yet involved, that it is hoped the meeting will continue to be an annual event.

The Human Resources Division of the Laboratory includes a Learning Resource Center (LRC), which is a part of the Training Office and serves as a library for Quality Circle information. The resources available include books, cassettes, and videotapes which can be loaned to those groups desiring to gain knowledge about the effective approaches toward the formation of a Quality Circle. The LRC offers commercial resources, while the Video Learning Center offers its services in audio-visual production. Feature-length training videotapes are made on location at the Laboratory involving the Quality Circles, Training Specialists, and managers.

At the 1984 National IAQC Conference in Cincinnati, Ohio the Quality Circle Coordinator from Los Alamos National Laboratory made contact with representatives from Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and Sandia National Laboratory and experienced a beneficial exchange of information concerning the Quality Circle activities at their respective laboratories. This meeting resulted in phone conversations and videotaped presentations of vital Quality Circle information. For example, in 1985 employees of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and Sandia National Laboratory communicated with specific Circles at Los Alamos to share reports of their activities. The Lawrence Livermore representative noted that there were not many training materials available for industries which rely heavily upon critical and analytical thinking and subjective problem solving. However, they found an abundance of training materials targeted at industries involved in the production of commercial products. They modified available materials to fit their Research and Development environments. The Sandia National Laboratory report expressed the supportive involvement of their management, who funded their luncheon meetings. This informative exchange served the purpose of making each of the three participating laboratories aware of their ability to tailor the Quality Circle program to fit their specialized environment.

In July, 1986 an Employee Involvement Team Report was produced to make the exchange of information between the Quality Circles and the Laboratory population easier. Formal interviews with representatives from each Circle, as mentioned previously, were used to collect relevant data about Circle progress. Reviews of journal articles and a management response was included. The report provided useful information about the efforts of the Laboratory, and helped to promote the interests of the Circle members and the Training Office.

### **Success Through Networking**

Many of the Quality Circles at the Laboratory have made notable progress due to their networking efforts. A number of the projects undertaken by the Circles required a significant amount of information sharing in order to research, develop, and implement their projects:

**IS-12 Quality Circle** - Employees in this group are responsible for publication design and technical illustration, and established their Circle in April, 1985. The unique characteristic of this Circle is that the group leader and deputy group leader initially served as the Circle leader and facilitator respectively. Circle members agreed that including management in the Circle process would allow them greater access to information which would not ordinarily be readily accessible. The insight and knowledge of their management members facilitated Circle progress, promoted success, and made evident the strong presence of management support.

**MST-10 Quality Circle** - When the MST-10 Circle reorganized in April, 1986, their primary project became the development of a method to improve the system for tracking the status of incoming items requiring assay. The Circle worked in conjunction with a Chemistry group (CHM-1), which had previously solved a similar tracking problem. The CHM-1 group evaluated the plans and the implementation. The MST-10 group experienced great success with their tracking solution.

**IS-9 Quality Circle** - This Circle of photographers developed an in-house training program specifically for the members of their group who seek to broaden their knowledge and skill. When a computer science group expressed the desire to begin an in-house training program as well, Circle members from IS-9 served as consultants to the group.

**HSE-9 Quality Circle** - Submitting a proposal to management for a new ventilation system for their facility involved a thorough job of data collection. The incredible amount of documentation required was not located within the HSE-9 facility, so a lengthy search ensued with the aid of other groups and individuals. The Circle commends two engineering groups, the HSE-5 (Industrial Hygiene) section, and the HSE Division Office for their contributions to the effort. Their

involvement in the search required much time and energy. Without their contributions the HSE-9 Quality Circle would have been greatly hindered in its progress.

Barbara Connellee is an IAQC certified Facilitator and has probably facilitated more Los Alamos Quality Circles since 1981 than anyone else at the Laboratory. Her facilitation of numerous Circles involves the transfer of vital information concerning procedure, management receptivity, and available monies, in addition to her theoretical knowledge of Quality Circles acquired through training and extensive experience. Her role as a mediator between the Circles, and between the Circles and management, has significantly facilitated the Circle process at the Laboratory.

## **Conclusion**

The productivity and communication of the organization can be greatly improved by Quality Circles and Quality Circle members extending their involvement to include other Circles and other divisions within and without the organization. The successes of the Quality Circles at the Laboratory have been significantly enhanced by networking efforts. The services and knowledge of Circle members are made readily available to others so that the organization may jointly move toward the accomplishment of their goals. It is important that each individual within the organization, whether involved in the Circle process or not, maintains a non-possessive attitude toward his or her achievements which serve to positively influence the progress of the organization. The Laboratory at Los Alamos can claim innumerable victories using the networking approach. The networking efforts of the functioning Quality Circles meaningfully enhance the progress.

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### **Biographical Information**

**Stephanie D. McIver, an Industrial Psychology Summer Intern (1986), is currently a Senior Psychology student at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. As an intern at Los Alamos National Laboratory in Los Alamos, New Mexico, she was introduced to the concept of Quality Circles and helped to develop the first Quality Circle Report. She was also instrumental in the initial steps taken to organize a local chapter of the IAQC. After graduation in May, 1987, Ms. McIver has plans to enter a doctoral program in the area of Clinical Psychology.**